

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE MICHIGAN BASIN GEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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Some time in the Spring of 1936, Robert Newcombe, then Vice President of Associated Petroleum Company, Mt. Pleasant, Michigan, visited Benjamin Hake, District Geologist for Pure Oil, at Hake's office in Saginaw. The reason for the visit, as Newcombe would recall many years later, was business, but the discussion eventually turned to another topic.

Since the 1928 discovery of oil in the nearby Saginaw Field and the subsequent oil boom that swept over Michigan, many petroleum geologists had arrived in the State. There was as such, no established forum for these explorationists to discuss the emerging geology and problems of mutual interest. Many university geologists and some petroleum geologists attended the annual geology field trips of the Michigan Academy of Arts, Sciences, and Letters, which began running in 1931. Hake had something more wide-ranging in mind, however, and suggested that a local professional society be formed under the auspices of the American Association of Petroleum Geologists. Newcombe agreed with enthusiasm.

Later, in the Fall of 1936, Newcombe and W. A. Clark of Well Elevation Service, met with W. A. Thomas of McClanahan Oil Company, in McClanahan's Mt. Pleasant office. The three further formulated plans for a professional society, while Hake contacted A.A.P.G. Headquarters in Tulsa for instructions on how to proceed with the formal steps necessary to form an affiliated society.

W. A. Thomas was given the task of drawing up a constitution and by-laws. An organizational meeting was called and notices were sent to all geologists known to be residing in Michigan. At that meeting, the Michigan Geological Society was founded, with Robert Newcombe elected as its first President.

In a 1959 letter, W. A. Thomas and Robert Newcombe would state that the founders of the Michigan Geological Society were Benjamin Hake, W. A. Clark, a young Sun Geologist names Glenn Sleight, and themselves.

Soon added to the office of President were: Vice President, Secretary-Treasurer, and Business Manager. In 1960, the office of Secretary-Treasurer was split into separate offices which remain to this day. Dues of the new Society were initially set at \$2.00 per year, and fluctuated between \$1.00 and \$2.00 during the Depression and War years.

The location for Michigan Geological Society meetings changed every month, ranging from Lansing, Saginaw, Mt. Pleasant, Ann Arbor and Grand Rapids, and finally settling in East Lansing in the 1950's because of its central location.

As today, meetings were held once a month, September through May, and were usually centered around a featured speaker and a formal presentation. Sometimes, though, a number of speakers were present, and the meetings began in the early afternoon and lasted through the evening, with a break for supper. Discussion following presentations was often lengthy and enthusiastic.

Although topics pertaining to petroleum exploration were originally the main focus for the society, papers and discussions relating to all aspects of geology soon joined the agenda of the monthly meetings. The minutes from meetings recorded as early as 1938 describe presentations dedicated to correlation problems, stratigraphy, structural geology, glacial geology, paleontology, air photo interpretation, geophysics, mineral deposits, and depositional history, as well as hydrocarbon source rocks and petroleum geology of Michigan and other areas.

All was not business and serious discussion, however. The minutes from one meeting early in the society's history relate that the presentation for that evening included color motion pictures from a recent Michigan-Ohio State football game. This was followed, appropriately enough, with a presentation by the renowned K. K. Landes concerning "A Curriculum in Petroleum Geology"

In 1957, the members of the Michigan Geological Society recognized the interest and participation of many of their number from other Great Lakes states and Ontario. For this reason, the name was changed from Michigan Geological Society to the Michigan Basin Geological Society.

During the first 26 years, the society existed without an insignia or logo. In 1962, a competition was held for designs to represent the Michigan Basin Geological Society. The winning entry was the now familiar trace of the Great Lakes shoreline with juxtaposed microscope and rock hammer.

Special effort was made from the founding of the society to hold a field trip at least once a year, usually in the Spring. For the first two years, the society field trips were organized jointly with the Michigan Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters. In 1937, the Michigan Geological Society ran its first solo field trip to study the Devonian rocks of Alpena and Presque Isle counties.

Accompanying guidebooks have traditionally been published for field trips. Records of correspondence in the society archives contain many orders and requests for field trip guidebooks from many wide-ranging sources. Some guidebooks continue to be sought many years after they have gone out of print.

The society has sponsored Symposia and Special Papers from time to time, as interest and availability of authors dictate.

As an A.A.P.G. affiliate, the Michigan Basin Geological Society has sponsored A.A.P.G. Continuing Education Programs and Distinguished Lecturer series, a reflection of the society's petroleum heritage.

Membership in the Michigan Basin Geological Society has enjoyed more or less steady growth through the years. In 1985, the society initiated corporate membership. The response from the industry has been positive and renews a tradition of support.

The university communities have contributed richly to the Michigan Basin Geological Society with officers, active members, student members, and facilities. In return, the society's monthly meetings, symposia, and publications have provided a medium through which faculty and students alike can present their work.

Ties between the Michigan Geological Survey and the Michigan Basin Geological Society have been close since the beginning. Over the years, survey staff have worked diligently to help organize field trips, produce society publications, and provide technical presentations for society meetings. A number of survey staff have served as officers for the Michigan Basin Geological Society.

Since its founding 50 years ago, the Michigan Basin Geological Society has succeeded in providing a forum for the exchange of ideas and new discoveries. As an added bonus, members have shared the fellowship brought about by a common bond, namely, a love for the Earth Sciences.